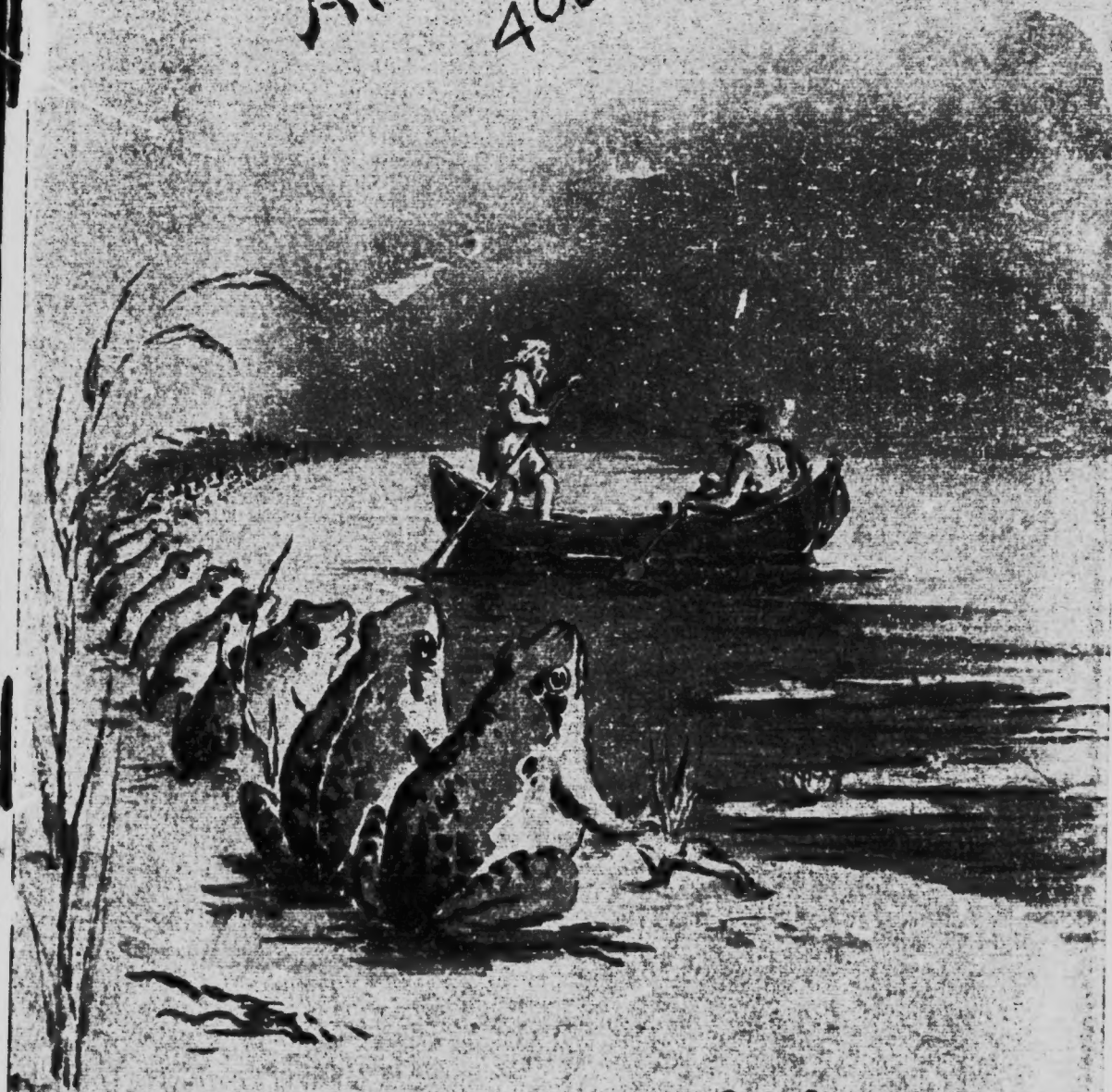


The
Frogs
of
Aristophanes
405 BC — 1902 AD



1852 ——— 1902

TRINITY COLLEGE

THE FROGS

OF

ARISTOPHANES.

ABRIDGED FROM THE TRANSLATION WRITTEN BY
THE REV. E. W. HUNTINGFORD, M.A.
of Shrewsbury School, Shrewsbury, England,
Professor of Classics in Trinity College, 1891 to 1900.

MUSIC BY
THE REV. G. F. DAVIDSON, M.A.
Vicar of St. George's, Guelph.

AND
THE REV. A. W. JENKS, B.D.
Professor in Divinity, Trinity College.

G. O. SMITH, M.A.	A. E. TAYLOR, '02	} <i>Editorial Committee.</i>
R. V. HARRIS, '02	C. C. ROBINSON, '04	

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FROGS.

THE Greek drama as a whole holds a unique place in the history of the literature of the world. It formed a more essential part of the life of the Greeks than has been the case with any other people. And this was not among the upper classes only. The plays were produced in a competitive exhibition at Athens during the festival of Dionysus, the patron god of the Drama, and rich and poor alike flocked to the theatre as much as a matter of course as the Londoner goes to Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday. Indeed, so far did this go that a measure was finally passed devoting part of the State revenue every year to providing seats for those who were too poor to pay for them themselves.

Of this national institution the most unique feature was the comedy of Aristophanes, which combined the most extraordinary varieties of qualities, and performed the most varied functions. Its work in general was that of a public censorship, and in the performance of it it combined satire on persons, politics, literature and religion. It was burlesque, fairy tale, allegory and leading article all in one.

But it differed essentially from modern comedy; for while the latter partakes of the tragic spirit, and delights in moral lessons and poetic justice, the former, no matter what its aim, was always ludicrous both to the spectators and to itself. Yet underlying the extravagant burlesque and unrestrained fancy of Aristophanes, there is always a serious, definite and constant purpose. From first to last Aristophanes was an Athenian conservative, an unswerving supporter of the old spirit of Athens, in morals, politics, religion and art.

This spirit may be clearly seen in all his plays. Thus in the "Acharnians" and the "Peace" he urges the Athenians to become reconciled to Sparta; in the "Birds" he

ridicules their ambition and extravagant dreams of conquest; in the "Knights" he bitterly attacks the demagogues and mob-leaders of Athens, whom he regarded as fostering and exciting these dreams; and in the *Clouds* he mercilessly ridicules the sophists, who under pretence of teaching true eloquence, and the art of public speaking, merely imparted an elaborate system of ingenious rhetorical quibbles, "who substituted logical discussion for the old æsthetic education of the Greeks, and who sought to replace their mythological religion by meteorological explanations of natural phenomena." Thus, though the theme is varied to suit time and circumstance, the purpose remains the same.

So in the "Frogs," in which he turns to literary criticism, he shows the same conservative spirit. His hostility to Euripides is founded upon the sophistical nature of his works; "In fact the Demagogues, the Sophists and Euripides were looked upon by him as three different forms of the same poison which was corrupting the moral character of the nation."

The play falls into two parts, as will be seen from the synopsis, the first describing the adventures of Dionysus and Xanthias on their journey, while the second describes a poetical contest between Æschylus and Euripides, the two great tragic poets, to decide which of them Dionysus shall take back with him to the Upper World. This part of the play, which consists of an elaborate parody on the styles of the two poets, has little interest for a modern audience as compared with the first part, and in the edition which is being acted has accordingly been considerably abridged. It is hoped, however, that enough has been retained to enable the audience to grasp the general tone and drift of Aristophanes' criticism.

The "Frogs" was produced in January, 405 B.C., the last year but one of the Peloponnesian War. Though victorious at the sea-battle of Arginusæ in 406 B.C., the Athenians were soon destined to meet with disastrous defeat at Ægospotami in the Hellespont (August 405 B.C.), after which the city first endured some months of siege, and then surrendered to the victorious Spartan confederacy under Lysander. Thus ended the "Athenian Empire." Athens had in the great Persian Wars (490,

480, 479 B.C.) played the most prominent part in the defence of Greece against the Oriental invasion; afterwards she had led the Maritime States of the Ægean in the vigorous prosecution of the war; and eventually had freed all the islands and the Greek cities of Asia Minor from Persian supremacy. From being their leader, however, she became their mistress, and on land also for a short time she asserted her supremacy in Greece proper. The result of her success was to divide Greece into two hostile camps, that of Athens and her subject allies, and that of the Spartan Confederacy (Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, etc.) In 431 the long struggle of the Peloponnesian War began; and continued, with the interval of a few years of doubtful peace, till 404. At first Athens held her own, but the disastrous failure of the expedition against Syracuse in Sicily (415-413) so crippled her that her final surrender was only a matter of time.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

<i>Dionysus</i> ; the wine-god, patron of the	
Drama disguised as Heracles. -	<i>E. T. Owen.</i>
<i>Xanthias</i> ; his slave - - -	<i>H. F. D. Woodcock.</i>
<i>Heracles</i> ; the patron of Athletics. -	<i>H. H. Wilkinson.</i>
<i>Corpse</i> - - - -	<i>J. Dunning.</i>
<i>Charon</i> ; the ferryman of the Styx -	<i>J. D. Dunfield.</i>
<i>Æacus</i> ; judge in the Lower World,	
acting as porter to Pluto. -	<i>A. R. Kellev.</i>
<i>Servant of Persephone.</i> - - -	<i>C. C. Robinson.</i>
<i>First Landlady</i> - - - -	<i>W. E. Kidd.</i>
<i>Second Landlady</i> - - - -	<i>E. M. Sait.</i>
<i>Euripides</i> - - - -	<i>F. N. Creighton.</i>
<i>Æschylus</i> - - - -	<i>R. B. Nevitt.</i>
<i>Pluto</i> - - - -	<i>A. E. Taylor.</i>
<i>Donkey</i> - - - -	{ <i>F. G. Allen.</i>
	{ <i>W. S. Greening.</i>
<i>Bearers, Slaves, etc.</i> ; <i>A. J. Patton,</i>	<i>C. W. Sealey.</i>
<i>C. A. Peterson, J. Cairns,</i>	<i>E. H. Ker.</i>
<i>Chorus of Frogs</i> ; <i>A. D. Armour,</i>	<i>C. F. Clarke.</i>
	<i>C. R. DePencier, S. R. C. Henderson.</i>
	<i>G. E. Holt, L. C. Hodgins.</i>
	<i>R. G. Armour, C. R. Spencer.</i>
<i>Chorus of Mystics</i> ; <i>A. D. Armour (Corypheus),</i>	
	<i>Miss M. L. Nevitt, Miss M. L. Pattee.</i>
	<i>Miss M. Rogers, Miss K. Gunne.</i>
	<i>Miss L. Smith, Miss I. Anthes.</i>
	<i>Miss B. Francis, Miss L. Angel.</i>
	<i>Miss F. Deacon, Miss M. D. Keefer.</i>
	<i>Miss H. McClung, Miss M. T. Owen.</i>
	<i>C. F. Clarke, C. R. DePencier.</i>
	<i>S. R. C. Henderson, G. E. Holt.</i>
	<i>L. C. Hodgins, R. G. Armour</i>
	<i>C. R. Spencer.</i>

SYNOPSIS—SCENE I.

Euripides the third of the great Attic tragedians had died during the previous year (406 B.C.); and Dionysus, the patron god of the Drama, being disgusted with all the remaining poets, determines to make a journey to the lower world and bring him back to earth again. The god being of a naturally timid disposition, makes himself up as Herakles, putting on his strong brother's lion-skin over his own effeminate costume, and carrying his club in his hand. There is nothing heroic or even dignified about him; he is, in fact, a caricature of a very foolish Athenian citizen, of courage and intelligence decidedly below the average, and compares badly with his sturdy slave Xanthias, who carries his luggage.

In the first scene he calls on Herakles to ask the way, since he had been down there some time ago to carry off Cerberus, and, as it proves, had left in the minds of various inhabitants of these regions, vivid recollections, of which the unfortunate Dionysus reaps the benefit. After discussing the merits of the various poets of the day and the several roads of travel to the lower world, Dionysus and Xanthias set out on their journey.

SCENE I.

Scene. *A country lane, with the house of Herakles on the stage right.*

Enter, from the left, Dionysus, walking, and Xanthias riding an ass and carrying a bundle on a stick over his shoulder.

Xan. Am I to make one of the common hits
That always sends the audience into fits? (1)

Dion. Yes, anything you like but "Oh, this weight!"
For that's the kind of thing I've come to hate.

(1) Aristophanes is laughing at a custom prevalent among the inferior dramatists of introducing overloaded slaves, whose sole business it was to groan and grumble.

- Xan. Or something else that's witty and expressive?
- Dion. Only don't mention that your load's oppressive!
- Xan. What was the use of loading me up thus.
If I am not to talk like Phrynichus? (1)
Why, Lykis and Ameipsias always
Have comic slaves, with bundles, in their plays!
- Dion. (*Shaking his finger at him.*)
Now don't you do it! When I'm in the stalls
And see that sort of gag, it simply galls;
I'm more than twelve months older when its done.
- Xan. (*Ruefully rubbing the back of his neck.*)
Ay, but my neck's the real unlucky one,
It gets the galling, and mayn't have the fun!
- Dion. (*Appealing to the Audience.*)
What insolence is this and monstrous "side"!
I toil on foot and let this fellow ride,
I, Dionysus, son of — Demijohn, (2)
To save him being tired and put upon!
- Xan. (*Sulkily.*) 'Tis put upon me.
- Dion. No, you're riding, you!
- Xan. But I've got this (*pointing to his bundle*).
- Dion. How?
- Xan. Pretty badly, too;
- Dion. But what you've got—doesn't the donkey bear it?
- Xan. No, sir. I carry what I've got, I'll swear it!
- Dion. How *can* you bear what some one else is bearing?
- Xan. I don't know, but my shoulder finds it wearing.
- Dion. Well, if the ass is useless, as you said,
Pick up the ass and carry him instead.

(1) Phrynichus gained the second prize on this occasion. Ameipsias defeated Aristophanes for first prize in a previous contest. Lycis was probably a very inferior poet, with whom the other two are satirically classed.

(2) An unexpected substitute for "Zeus"—appropriate enough for the wine-god.

Xan. O Lor'! why wasn't I in that sea fight? (1)
I'd have been free, and bidden you good night?

Dion. (*Noticing the house.*)

Get off! I've got there walking after all.
This is the first place where I was to call.

(*Xanthias dismounts, and donkey wanders away.
Dionysus bangs at the door with his hand and foot
and club, making a terrific noise and shouting.*)

Dion. Hi, porter! slave, I say; slave, let me enter!

Her. (*Suddenly opening the door and looking out.*) (2)

Who's knocking there? I thought it was a centaur!

(*Stepping back and bursting into laughter.*)

Great heaven! what *is* that?

Dion. (*Aside to Xanthias.*) Did you see my lad?

Xan. What?

Dion. How I scared him.

Xan. Yes, lest you were mad?

Her. Laugh! Oh, Demeter, I am nearly split!
I bite my lips, but roar in spite of it.

Dion. Here, my good friend, there's something that I want.

Her. (*Coming out, still choking with amusement.*)

I'm trying to stop laughing, but I can't.

What is the dress you're masquerading in?

A lady's yellow blouse, and lion's skin!

That's a queer combination—club and slipper!

What's brought you out from home? are you
turned tripper?

Dion. Oh, I was serving on the — Kleisthenes. (3)

Her. Were you in action?

Dion. Yes, and if you please
We sank a dozen of them, more or less

(1) At the battle of Arginusæ, in the previous year, B.C. 406, the slaves who distinguished themselves by their bravery were given their liberty.

(2) Herakles twice punished the Centaurs for insolence.

(3) That is, as a marine, at the Battle of Arginusæ, Kleisthenes was an Athenian of disreputable character.

- Her. You two!
- Dion. Why not?
- Her. (*Aside.*) "It was a dream," I guess.
- Dion. Why, yes, and as I sat upon the boat
And read *Andromeda*, (1) a passion smote
My heart, quite hard, you know, and by surprise.
- Her. Passion? how big?
- Dion. Little, just Molon's size! (2)
- Her. For a woman?
- Dion. No; and if you please, I pray
Don't rack, I'm really in a parlous way,
Such "me" incholy marks me for its prey."
- Her. What sort, my brother?
- Dion. Well, it's hard to state it:
A figure might perhaps elucidate it.
Have you ever suddenly began to crave
For porridge? (3)
- Her. Rather? I should think I have!
- Dion. D'you understand, or shall I try again?
- Her. Porridge is clear enough, I see that plain.
- Dion. It's just that kind of love consumes me for
Euripides.
- Her. (*Interrupting.*) And him just dead, O lor'!
- Dion. And no one shall persuade me not to go and fetch
him.
- Her. What to Hades, down below?
- Dion. If there's and still further down, I'll go it.
- Her. What do you want?

(1) Euripides' play, very popular among the Athenians, turns upon the "passion" of Andromeda for her deliverer, Perseus.

(2) An actor of huge stature, in the plays of Euripides, probably the protagonist in the *Andromeda*.

(3) Herakles' gluttony—a favorite point in Athenian comedy—leads Dionysus to explain his desire by comparing it to a craving for pulse-porridge, the diet of soldiers and athletes.

Dion.

A really clever poet?

(*Sadly.*) For some are dead, only the bad survive? (1)

Her. But Iophon (2), is he not still alive?

[*A short discussion follows on the "relative merits" of the poets of the time, Xanthias making remarks now and then which betray his impatience. Dionysus then turns the conversation and makes enquiries about the journey to the lower world—a journey which Heracles has previously made to steal the dog Cerberus.*]

Xan. (*Aside.*) But as for me, I'm nigh clean out of it!

Dion. But, for the job that's brought me with this kit
Made up like you—I wan't to get a tip
About your friends on that dog-stealing trip.
Tell me the harbours and the bakeries,
The lodgings, respectable and otherwise.
Tell me the wayside inns, the springs, the roads,
Towns, restaurants, and hostesses—abodes
Of fewest bugs.

Xan. (*In a voice of loud and angry impatience.*)
And I'm out of it still.

Her. (*Sarcastically to Dionysus.*)
D'you mean to go? What recklessness!

Dion. (*With offended Dignity.*) You will
Be kind enough to drop all that, and tell
The quickest way for me to get to Hell,
And not too cold a one, and not too hot.

Her. (*Giving his information very slowly.*)
Let's see—what road shall I first tell him?—What?
There's one that starts you from "The Rope and
Thwart"—(3)
By hanging.

(1) Quoted from the *Cæneus* of Euripides. Aristophanes constantly ridicules Euripides by parodies and absurd quotations.

(2) Iophon, son of Sophocles, himself a tragic poet of some merit, but currently suspected of being helped by his father, or of bringing out his late father's tragedies as his own.

(3) The rowing-bench and towing rope of a galley, suggesting to Dionysus a voyage over sea. Heracles however speedily changes his meaning.

- Dion. Don't, that's such a stifling sort. (1)
- Her. Well, there's a short cut, then, a beaten way
Via "The Pestle and Mortar."
- Dion. Hemlock, eh?
- Her. Just so.
- Dion. Ugh! That too stormy and too cold; (2)
Your calves get frozen at the start, I'm told.
That's not the way I'll go.
- Her. Your plans unfold.
- Dion. The one *you* went.
- Her. That's a long voyage to take,
For all at once you'll come upon a lake
That's simply fathomless and very wide.
- Dion. Well, then, how shall I reach the other side?
- Her. An aged sailor-man (3) will ferry you
For three pence (4) in an infant-sized canoe.
- Dion. When!
The almighty three pence everywhere in force!
Who brought it there?
- Her. Why, Theseus (5) did, of course.
Then you'll see snakes and every kind of beast—
Awful! (*Chuckles.*)
- Dion. (*In great alarm.*)
Don't I'm not frightened in the least,
You won't scare *me*.
- Her. And then you'll see a flood
Of ever-flowing sewage, seas of mud,
Where you will notice in the garbage floating
Those who loved bogus company promoting,
Who thrashed mamma, or blacked their father's
eyes.

(1) Stifling in two senses.

(2) See Plato's account of the death of Socrates in *Phædo*.

(3) Charon, who ferried the dead across to the lower world.

(4) Referring to the custom of putting money into a dead man's mouth to pay Charon for his passage. Three pence (two obols) was the price of a ferry to Egina (opposite Athens), the price of a theatre ticket, a juryman's fee, and also the compensation for loss of time to a citizen in sitting in the Assembly of Athens.

(5) Theseus, the typical hero of Athens and founder of her popular institutions, is represented as having introduced this peculiarly national fee into the lower world.

Perjured themselves, or quoted M—— rhapsodies (1)
 And after that you'll hear some music play,
 And see a light, as clear as any day
 On earth, and myrtle groves and happy bands,
 Women and men, and clapping of glad hands.

Dion. They are — ?

Her. The "mysteries" are their profession,

Xan. (*Who has been getting more and more visibly impatient.*)
 And I'm the ass that walks in the procession ;
 But not one second more will I hold these.
 (*Throws down the bundle.*)

Her. And they will tell you anything you please.
 It's close to Pluto's palace door they dwell,
 Hard by the road. So, brother, fare thee well.

Dion. Goodbye !
 (*Turning to Xanthias.*)

Take up again the bundle—you ;

Xan. (*Sulkily.*) Before I've dropped it !

Dion. Yes, and quickly, too.

Xan. Oh, master, don't I beg you ! hire instead
 One of these fellows who are really dead ;
 It's just their business.

Dion. Ay, but if I should
 Not find one ?

Xan. Well, then, I must.

Dion. Well and good.

(*Enter four undertaker's slaves carrying a dead man on a stretcher out to burial.*)

Dion. Why, heres a corpse just being carried by.
 Hullo ! It's you I mean, you dead man, hi !
 My traps for Hades ! Will you take the job ?

(*Bearers stop; the dead man sits up.*)

Corpse. How much ?

(1) He considers Morsimus, (whose name he all but mentioned) such a bad poet that to quote from one of his plays is sufficient crime to ensure punishment in the next world.

Dion. (*Pointing to the bundle on the ground.*)

This only.

Corpse. If you'll pay two bob.

Dion. By Jove! that's sheer extortion, far too dear!

Corpse. Move on, you undertakers; do you hear?

(*The bearers go slowly forwards.*)

Dion. My good man, wait a bit, let's compromise.

Corpse. Don't waste your breath, two shillings is my price.

Dion. Take eighteen pence.

Corpse. I'd come to life again first!

(*The dead man lies down again, and the bearers exeunt.*)

Xan. Bad luck go with you for a most accurst
Conceited knave! I'll go then, I don't mind.

Dion. You're a good fellow, Xanthias, and kind.

(*Xanthias shoulders the bundle once more; and they both march off.*)

SYNOPSIS—SCENE II.

Dionysus and Xanthias now come to the Lower World, and arrive at the banks of the Lake of Acheron. Charon, the ferryman, appears but refuses to carry Xanthias, who has to go round. Accompanied from below by an unseen chorus of Frogs, he proceeds to make Dionysus row the boat across, in which the latter finds considerable difficulty; for, besides being unaccustomed to such exercise, he is driven almost to distraction by the incessant noise of the frogs. However, he meets them with their own weapons, and triumphantly silences them.

SCENE II.

The Lower World. Dionysus and Xanthias are standing in the murky gloom upon the shore of the Lake of Acheron, waiting for Charon (who is not seen at first) to come and ferry them across.

Dion. Let's to the boat

Char. (*From afar.*) Ahoy!

Xan. What's this?

Dion. The lake

He told us of.

[*Charon brings his boat to the wharf.*]

And here's the boat to take.

[*Charon comes ashore.*]

Xan. Yes, by Poseidon, and there's Charon too.

Dion. How d'you do, Charon? Charon, how d'you do?

Char. (*Bawling*)

Who's for the Rest from toil, the Land of Peace,
The Plain of Lethe (1) or the Asses' Fleece (2)?
Who's for the Dogs, Crimea (3) or Hellgate?

(1) A river in the Lower World, which caused all who drank of it to forget their cares.

(2) The Greeks had a proverb, "To shear the ass," analogous to our "Great cry and little wool."

(3) The Greek word here means "The crows," which was equivalent to our "Jericho."

Dion. I.

Char. All aboard! Make haste!

Dion. (*Waggishly.*) Where did you state.
You went to? To the dogs? Now is that true?

Char. Of course it is; I'm going there for you.
Get in now.

Dion. (*Getting into the boat.*) Come on Xanthias.

Char. (*Pushing Xanthias back.*) Slaves don't ride.
Then you must run all round by the lake side.

Xan. And meet you, where?

Char. The stone of Withering,
Beside the seat.

Dion. D'you see

Xan. I'll find the thing.
Oh dear! oh dear! What did I meet
This morning when I stepped into the street? (1)

Char. Sit at the oar.

[*Dionysus sits down upon the oar.*]

Char. (*Shouting.*) Whoever else is going
Must hurry up! (*Turns round and sees Dionysus.*)
Hallo! what are you doing?

Dion. (*Innocently.*)
What am I doing? What else should I be
But sitting on it, as you said to me?

Char. Sit down here on the thwart, you great fat lout!

Dion. There, then! (*Sits down.*)

Char. Put out your hands, now, and reach out.

Dion. (*Helplessly holding out his hands.*)
There, then!

Char. Stop all that fooling! You want
To feel your stretcher, and row hard.

Dion. I can't,
Untrained, unsalted, never in a skiff.
How can I row?

(1) The first thing met on a journey was regarded by the superstitious as an omen of its success or non-success.

Char. Easy enough, for if
You dip your blade, you'll hear the loveliest chime
Of swan-frogs (1), wonderful !

Dion. (*Resignedly.*) Well, set the time.

Char. (*Chanting.*) Ahoy, oh ! Ahoy, oh !

[*Dionysus begins rowing.*]

Chorus of Ghosts of Frogs from Altica, below.

Frogs. Brekekekex, koax koax !
Brekekekex, koax, koax !
Children of spring and lake.
Raise together the choral strain,
Echoing back the flute again ;
Sweet is the song we make.
This is the hymn we used to raise (2)
In heaven-born Dionysus' praise
At Limnæ, (3) in the osier.
Brekekekex, koax, koax ?

Dion. (*Moving uneasily in his seat.*)
I'm getting sore just where I sit
But you, I suppose, don't care a bit !

Frogs. Brekekekex, koax koax !

Dion. Oh, curses upon you, koax and all !
You're perfectly useless, except to bawl.

Frogs. Likely enough,
You meddlesome muff !
For I'm the darling of the muses
And the goat-legged god who the pan-pipe uses.
Brekekekex, koax koax !

Dion. My hands and my fingers are blistering,
And then you promptly pop up and sing—

Frogs. Brekekekex, koax koax !

Dion. (*Ironically.*) Melodious people, be quiet, I pray.

(1) *i.e.* Sweet-singing frogs. The ancients believed the swan to be possessed of a beautiful voice, especially when dying.

(2) *i.e.* When we were living frogs in the upper world.

(3) Limnæ, "the swamps," was a marshy spot in Athens, where stood the Lenæon, the oldest temple of Dionysus.

Frogs. On the contrary, sir, we have plenty to say
 And haven't a notion of stopping,
 If ever on earth the sunshine was bright
 In shrilling and diving we took our delight
 Through the sedges luxuriant hopping ;
 Or if we went down to get out of the thunder
 And sent up a quavering warble from under
 The water with bubbles a-popping.
 Brekekekex, koax koax
 Brekekekex, koax.

Dion. I feel its taking—this koaxination !

Frogs. If it does, it will cause us a little vexation.

Dion. But it's many times worse for me, you know,
 If I break into pieces with trying to row.

Frogs. Brekekekex, koax koax !

Dion. Shriek away, what do I mind your attacks.

Frogs. But for all that, we'll yell and shout
 All day, as long as our throats last out.
 Brekekekex, koax.

(Louder than before.)

Dion. *(Triumphantly.)*
 I've got it now. *(Louder still.)* Brekekekex koax !
 You never shall beat me at this little game !

Frogs. But we'll be victorious all the same.

Dion. Never, you'll find me still going strong
 If I have to be yelling the whole day long—
(At the top of his voice.)

Brekekekex, koax koax !

Until I compel you to cry out "pax."

(He pauses. The frogs make no answer. Then triumphantly.)

I thought I should presently stop your quacks.
(They now reach the other side.)

Char. Easy all ! Ship your oars ! and pay your fare
 After you've landed. *(Holding out his hand.)*

Dion. *(Stepping out and giving him the money.)*
 Take your three pence, there !

(Exit Charon.)

Dion. *(Shouting.)* Where be you Xanthias, Xanthias ?
 Where ; be gone ?

Xan. (*Within.*) Yoho!

This way! (1)

(*Enter Xanthias.*)

Xan. Master, I'm glad to see you.

Dion. What's yonder country like?

Xan. It's all quite dark.
And full of mud.

Dion. Did you by chance remark
The liars and the people he maligned
For jumping on their parents?

Xan. Are you blind? (2)
[*Turning him round and pointing to the audience.*]

Dion. I see them now, they're in the stalls, by Jove.
Well what comes next?

Xan. I think we'd better move;
This is the place that gentleman (3) spoke about
That's full of bogies

Dion. Won't I pay him out.
He piled it up to make me get a fright
Because he knew I was a man of might,
For fear his own achievements should be beat.
Nothing like Herakles for sheer conceit?
I'd like a small adventure with a devil
To raise the journey's rather prosy level.

Xan. (*Pretending.*)
By Jove, what's that? Some sort of noise I hear.

Dion. Wh—where?

Xan. Behind us.

Dion. Go and guard the rear.

(*Xanthias goes behind.*)

Xan. In front now

Dion. Get in front.

(1) The spectators must remember that it is supposed to be dark during this scene.

(2) See above line. Ill treatment of aged parents seems to have been common at Athens, as in Whitechapel, *e.g.*,

"When the coster's finished jumping on his mother,
He loves to lie a-basking in the sun."

(3) Hits at the audience were a standing form of joke.

(Dionysus hangs back. Xanthias goes forward and peers into the darkness.)

Xan. Lor', what a beast!

Dion. *(In terror.)* What?

Xan. Awful, with a dozen shapes at least!
A cow—a mule—and now a dog instead.

Dion. Ah, that's Empusa! (1)

Xan. Anyhow, her head
Is all a-blaze.

Dion. Has she one brazen peg?

Xan. Of course, and green-mud for the other leg.

Dion. Where shall I hide?

Xan. *(Trying to conceal his amusement, to the audience.)*
I need it worse, I think.

Dion. *(Looking wildly round, and catching sight of the priest of Dionysus sitting in the middle of the front row of the audience.)*

Priest, save me! and let's go and have a drink—

Xan. Its all up with us, Herakles, my lord.

Dion. I beg and pray you not to breathe that word,
Or call me by that name.

Xan. Well, Dionysus,

Dion. Why, that is still more like to compromise us.

Xan. *(To the ghost.)* Go back the way you came.
(Joyfully to Dionysus.) Here, Master, here!

Dion. What's up?

Xan. It's all right now, you needn't fear,
For, as the actor said not long ago,
"The stormy winds now weaselly do blow." (2)
Empusa's banished.

(1) Empusa was a spectre which could assume various shapes, sent to frighten travellers in dark mysterious places.

(2) Hegelochus, the protagonist in the *Orestes* of Euripides, mispronounced the word *galena* "a calm" in such a way as to sound like *galen*, "a weasel," thus making the line mean "After the storm I see a weasel."

- Dion. Swear.
 Xan. Yes, I declare it.
 Dion. Again!
 Xan. By Jove, yes!
 Dion. Swear!
 Xan. By Jove, I swear it!
 Dion. Oh dear, why are these horrid things annoying me?
 Which of the gods is bent upon destroying me?
 Xan. Hi! [*Singing is heard within.*]
 Dion. What's the matter?
 Xan. Don't you hear it?
 Dion. Well?
 Xan. The sound of flutes.
 Dion. Yes, and the torches smell?
 That's most suggestive of the mysteries.
 "Dissemble," and we'll listen. Quick, please!
 (*They crouch down.*)
 Chor. (*Within.*) Iacchus, O Iacchus!
 Iacchus, O Iacchus!
 Xan. Master, I've got it, that's the very party
 He told us of, they're the illuminate (1)
 Dion. I think so, too. But just you hold your tongue.
 Or else we shan't hear what is being sung.
 (*The Chorus sing, Dionysus and Xanthias, listen.*)

(1) This scene is intended to represent the Eleusinian mysteries, and especially the proceedings of the sixth day of the celebration. These mysteries, which were of a peculiarly sacred character were celebrated annually by the initiated in honour of Demeter, goddess of the earthen harvest, and her daughter Persephone. Dionysus, the god of fertility, was soon associated with them, and he also was worshipped in the mysteries under the name of Iacchus. The events celebrated in the mysteries were the descent of Persephone into the lower world and her return to light and to her mother, the former at the Greater Eleusinia in the autumn, and the latter at the Lesser Eleusinia in the spring. On the sixth day of the Greater Eleusinia the statue of Iacchus was borne along the sacred road from Athens to Eleusis in the midst of a torch-light procession, and it is this part of the celebrations which is especially presented in this scene.

Come forth, Iacchus, come !
 And leave thy honoured home
 To dance upon this lawn, and here to meet
 The brotherhood
 Of holy men and good,
 Iacchus, O Iacchus !
 And waving round thy brows
 A wreath of myrtle boughs
 That teems with leaf and berry,
 With fearless feet
 Strike up the measure, unrestrained and merry,
 With grace that every sense can please,
 The mystic dance of holy votaries.

Xan. Now by our Lady, Great Persphone,
 A heavenly whiff of Roast Pork (1) reaches me !

Dion. Hush, you may get a sausage presently.

Chor. Awake ! our morning star
 Comes brandishing afar
 His torch of flame. The meadow gleams with light,
 The weight of years
 And sorrow disappears
 Iacchus, O Iacchus !
 And hoar decrepitude
 Falls off from limbs renewed.
 Thou blessed one advancing
 Step out aright,
 And lead thy youthfu' throng with torches glancing
 To foot the dances as of yore
 Upon the marsh's flower-spangled floor.

The Leader.

Ho ! clear the way for us we pray and speak with
 breath abated

Each one whose mind is unrefined and uninitiated.

(1) Pigs were sacrificed at the mysteries.

The Chorus. (To slow music.)

Boldly lead and each one follow
To the flowery meadow's hollow
Dancing, laughing, jesting, chaffing ;
We have had our fill of eating.

Forward then, your anthems raising
Our protecting goddess praising.
This year and the next our land she
Guards, in spite of guager's cheating

The Leader.

Change the metre, rather fleet, hail Demeter,
harvest queen
You must greet her and entreat her with a sweeter
song, I ween.

Chorus.

Goddess mysterious,
Grant me all day
Beneath thy protection
To dance and to play.

Merry and serious
Skillfully blend
And by thy protection
Be crowned in the end.

SYNOPSIS—SCENE III.

Xanthias and Dionysus now arrive at Pluto's palace. Here the troubles of Dionysus begin, for Aeacus, who is acting as Pluto's porter, recognizes him as the stealer of Cerberus and terrifies him with threats. But while he is gone for his slaves Dionysus persuades Xanthias to change clothes with him. The maidservant of Persephone now comes and receives the supposed Herakles quite cordially and invites him in to dinner. Dionysus, much impressed, as soon as she has gone, forces Xanthias again to change costumes. No sooner have they done so than Herakles (Dionysus) is assailed by two landladies whom the gluttonous hero had eaten out of house and home during his previous visit. Dionysus is so terrified by her threats, that while they are gone for assistance he again becomes the slave of Xanthias, whom he persuades to take the club and lion skin again. But now Aeacus returns with his slaves and pounces upon the Herakles-Xanthias, who makes a brave resistance. At length being overpowered, in accordance with the Athenian law he offers his slave (Dionysus) for torture. Dionysus in dismay affirms that he is a god and that Xanthias is his slave, but he cannot prove it. He suggests that Aeacus should give blows to each alternately to find out which is the god. They both disguise their feelings so well that Aeacus cannot decide, but sends them in to Pluto for judgment.

SCENE III.

Scene. In front the door of Pluto's house.

Enter Xanthias and Dionysus. They halt before the door.

Dion. Look here now, ring or knock? I wish I knew,
I wonder what the folk about here do.

Xan. Don't waste your time, but hammer at the door.
What good's a lion's skin without a roar?

Dion. (*Knocking.*) Ho! slave!

Acac. (*From within.*) Who's there?

Dion. 'Tis Herakles the great ———.

Aeac. O loathsome, shameless, and insatiate !
 O doubly, triply and quadruply vile !
 Who carried off our Cerberus by guile,
 Stole him away out of my guardianship
 And choked him. Now I have you on the hip,
 Such a black-hearted rock of Styx's flood
 And crag of Acheron (1) that drips with blood
 Have got you in their keeping safe at last,
 And ranging hounds of Hell shall hold you fast ;
 Echidna, (2) too, the hundred-headed beast,
 Shall devastate your bowels for a feast ;
 And thus your lungs—don't fancy this a sham,
 pray—
 Shall be mishandled by a Tarshish (3) lamprey ;
 Your vitals, heart and all, in gory state
 Be rent by Gorgon hags from Billingsgate (4)
 I'm off to fetch them at my swiftest rate !

Dion. (*As he sinks fainting with terror, in a weak voice to Xanthias.*)

Just bring the sponge and put it to my heart.

Xan. There, take it.

Dion. Put it—

Xan. Where? Is that the part
 You keep your heart in?

Dion. Generally, no ;
 But in its fear it slipped a bit below.

Xan. Well, of all gods and men—you coward, so afraid !

Dion. Weren't you, too, terrified at his tirade
 And threatening?

Xan. By Jove, I didn't care

(1) A river in Hades.

(2) A monster, half woman and half serpent, the mother of Cerberus.

(3) Tartessus is the modern Cadiz, being in the mystic, remote west it was supposed to contain strange monsters.

(4) The London Billingsgate corresponds to the Tithras of the original. This was an Atrian deme notorious for the shrewish tongues of its females.

Dion. (*Rising.*)

Look here then, since your courage is so rare,
Let's change our parts ; you don the lion's hide
And take this club, as you're so brave inside,
And I'll be baggage-mule for you in turn.

[*Xanthias puts down his bundle and takes the lion's skin and club.*]

Xan. (*Domineeringly.*) Pick it up quick, then !

There, you've got to learn ;
And see if I, Herakleoxanthias
Shall be like you, a coward and an ass !

[*Goes swaggering about.*]

Dion. Well, now, supposing I take up this freight.

[*Lifts up the baggage.*]

[*Enter a maidservant from the house.*]

Maid. Come in at once, dear Herakles, don't wait.
When goddess (1) heard that you were come she
straight

Baked loaves, and cooked two or three porridge
bowls

Of peas, and set a whole ox on the coals.

But come in, do, " the veal-cutlets will be
Served up," so says the cook, " immediately."

[*Exit into the house.*]

Xan. (*In a lordly tone to Dionysus.*)

Come here boy, take the bag and follow me.

[*Starts to walk away.*]

Dion. (*Angrily stopping him.*)

Hold on there, Xanthias ! You don't suppose
I mean't it seriously—this changing clothes ?

Drop this tomfool'ng, it's become a bore ;

Pick up the traps and carry them once more.

Xan. What's up ? It surely wasn't in your mind to
Rob me of what you gave ?

Dion. I'm not inclined to,
I do it. Put the skin down !

Xan. I protest,
And call the gods to witness I'm oppressed,

(1) Persephone, the wife of Pluto.

Dion. What gods? Would you, a slave, the son of none
Now think of posing as Alkmena's (1) son?

Xan. [*Sulkily giving in, and restoring the dress of
Herakles to Dionysus, who gives him back the
baggage.*]

Oh, well, all right then, if you must you must
You'll need me soon, that's all if heaven is just.

[*Enter two landladies, the former recognizes Hera-
kles (as she thinks) and starts to abuse him.*]

1st L. Plathane! Plathane! here's the man of sin,
The rogue that came that day into the inn
And ate up the sixteen loaves.

2nd L. By jove! that's he.

Xan. (*Aside.*) Some one will get it in the neck I see.

1st L. And all that garlic!

Dion. (*With dignified air.*) Nonsense my good woman,
You don't know what you are saying.

1st L. (*Shaking her first.*) Are you assumin',
Because you've got those shoes, that I'd forget?

2nd L. And all that pickle I've not mentioned yet!
Good gracious, no! nor yet the cheese and puddin'!
He ate the very dishes that they stood in!

1st L. And when I brought him in my bill, the fellow
Looked thunder at me and began to bellow.

Xan. Just like him; it's a way he always had.

2nd L. And drew his sword, pretending to be mad.

Xan. That's him! something you should have done, by
gad!

1st L. Of course; do go and call my champion Kleon. (2)

2nd L. And call for me Hyperbolus, (2) if you see 'im;
We'll grind him down.

(1) Alkema was the mother of Hercules by Jupiter.

(2) These two famous demagogues are represented as following the
same calling in the lower world as they did on earth. Both had died
shortly before the composition of this play.

- 1st L. (*As she goes away.*) You gormandizing hound,
Nothing would please me better than to pound
With a stone those teeth that gobbled up my wares.
- 2nd L. (*Also going and threatening.*)
I would like to fling you down the bottomless stairs.
- 1st L. I'd like to take a knife to your windpipe,
The one with which you hooked down all my tripe.
[*Exeunt to get assistance.*]
- Dion. (*Insinuatingly.*)
Xanthias, if I don't love you, I'll be shot.
- Xan. (*Angrily.*) I know what you're up to,
Stop that rot!
I won't be Herakles!
- Dion. Dear Xanthias, don't!
- Xan. Alkmena's son I can't be, and I won't,
Being a slave and mortal man beside.
- Dion. I know you're angry, and you're justified;
Even if you should beat me, I'll be dumb,
But if again in all the time to come
I take your things, then may the devil claim us,
Self, wife and child, and—bleary Archidamus (1)!
- Xan. (*Giving way as if this last touch were conclusive.*)
That's a good oath to swear in your position;
I take your bargain on that last condition.
[*Xanthias and Dionysus once more change dress.*]
[*Enter Aeacus suddenly with two slaves, who rush upon Xanthias.*]
- Aec. Seize the dog-stealer! quickly, I command,
To meet his due reward.
- Dion. Trouble's at hand for some one!
- Xan. [*Xanthias resists and a scuffle ensues.*]
Go to blazes! don't touch me!
- Aec. Eh? fighting my fine fellow? We'll soon see.
[*Calling for more slaves who rush in and join the fray.*]
Ditylas! Skeblyas! Pardokas!
Come ye here!

(1) The mention of this well-known bleary-eyed demagogue gives a ridiculous ending to the curse by its unexpected bathos.

- Xan. [*Shaking himself free.*]
 Well, now, by all the gods that I hold dear
 I never saw this place before to-day
 Or took the value of a hair away ;
 If not I'am quite content to meet my fate,
 And I will make an offer fair and straight ;
 Torture my slave, (1) and if you find a breath
 Of evidence, then let me die the death.
- Aec. Which tortures, please ?
- Xan. (*Indifferently.*) Oh, anything—the rack,
 The "cat" and triangles, and flay his back.
 Take him and hang him by the thumbs or toes
 And pour the vinegar into his nose,
Peine forte et dure. I'am not particular,
 Don't beat him with young leeks, that's all I bar.
- Aec. All right and if I seriously maim
 The fellow in the process, you can claim
 The compensation to the full amount
 Of the man's value.
- Xan. [*Generously.*] Not on my account !
 He's wholly in your hands ; so take him hence.
- Aec. No here : you ought to hear his evidence,
 [*Turning to Dionysus.*]
 Now you, put down your bundle and take care,
 None of your lying here, sir !
- Dion. I declare
 I'am an immortal, touch me if you dare !
- Aec. What's that ?
- Dion. (*Drawing himself up.*) I'm Dionysus, son of Zeus,
 (*Pointing to Xanthias.*) And that's my slave.
- Aec. (*To Xanthias.*) Hear that ?
- Xan. A good excuse !
 The better subject be for you to thrash,
 Being a god he'll never feel the lash.
- Dion. (*Angrily to Xanthias.*)
 Why then, since you too claim to be divine,
 You'd better get a blow for each of mine !

(1) This challenge which Xanthias so generously makes is quite in accordance with Athenian law. It was the regular custom to torture slaves to obtain evidence against their masters.

- Xan. All right (*to Aeacus*) whichever of us two you spy
Caring one jot, or uttering a cry,
Take him for the imposter,
- Aec. Breeding tells!
You're the real gentleman, whatever else;
Justice is what you like. Off with your coats!
[*They strip and take their places apart, with their
backs to Aeacus.*]
- Xan. How are you going to test us fairly?
- Aec. Oh, 't's
Easy, a blow in turn to each one.
- Xan. Yes.
There catch me flying signals of distress!
[*Aeacus gives Xanthias a cut; Xanthias makes a
face, but does not move.*]
- Aec. Well, I've just hit you.
- Xan. (*Incredulously.*) No, you didn't, though!
- Aec. I don't believe he felt it. Let me go and hit the
other. [*Hits Dionysus.*]
- Dion. (*Controlling himself.*) Tell me just where, please.
- Aec. Why, I did hit you.
- Dion. Then why didn't I sneeze?
- Aec. Don't know. Another try at *this* man's shirt
- Xan. Make haste! [*Aracus gives him a much harder cut.*]
Tut! tut!
- Aec. Why "tut! tut!"
Are you hurt?
- Xan. Oh lor, no! I just thought of an idea
About my festival in Diomea. (1)
- Aec. What piety! Now him again. Here goes!
[*Gives Dionysus a good cut. He howls and weeps.*]
- Dion. Yow!
- Aec. What's the matter?

(1) Xanthias cleverly construes the cry of pain that is forced from him into an expression of annoyance that the Diomea or festival in honor of Herakles (whose character he has assumed) has not been performed of late.

Dion. Knights, (1) in the front rows!

Aeac. Why are you crying, then?

Dion. Because they stink so.
Of onions.

Aeac. You're all right, then?

Dion. I should think so?

Aeac. Then I must give this man another blow.

[Hits Xanthias, who howls, then suddenly catches up his foot, pretending to have hurt it.]

Xan. Ah!

Aeac. What's the matter?

Xan. Splinter in my toe.

Aeac. T'other one now! It's a hard case to try though.
[Hits Dionysus.]

Dion. Apollo!—

[Then controlling himself, he pretends he is reciting a line.] "Lord of Delos or of Pytho." (2)

Xan. He's hurt! D'you hear him call out when you smote him?

Dion. Not I! It was Hipponax I was quoting.

Xan. (To Aeacus.)

That's nothing! Dust him well upon the haunch.

Aeac. Better than that! This time put out your paunch.

[Hits Dionysus on the stomach; he jumps up and cowers.]

Dion. Poseidon.

Xan. Some one's hurt!

Dion. (Finishing quotation again.)—"Who ruled o'er
The grey sea's depths or the Ægean shore."

Aeac. (Throwing down the whip.)

No, by Demeter, I cannot begin
To see which of you is a god, Go in;
The Master and Persephone will tell,
Because they both of them are gods as well.

Dion. Quite true! I wish you'd thought of that before
I got a beating for I'm pretty sore.

[They dress and go into the house.]

(1) Dionysus absurdly explains away his cry. Ou! yaw! might express either joy or pain.

(2) Quoted from the Laocoon of Sophocles.

SYNOPSIS—SCENE IV.

A scene is here omitted in which *Æacus* and *Xanthias* come out, arm in arm, from the Palace. Apparently *Pluto* has recognized the claims of the real *Dionysus*; but *Xanthias* accepts the position philosophically enough.

Suddenly a tremendous commotion is heard inside; *Xanthias* enquires the cause; *Æacus* explains that hitherto *Æschylus* had held the throne of tragedy among the dead, but was now being assailed by the new-comer, *Euripides*.

"Then came *Euripides* and gave a show:
 "Spouted to all the burglars, footpads, thieves,
 "And all the crowd of rogues that *Hell* receives.
 "And when he heard his captious special-pleading
 "His twists and turns so charmingly misleading
 "They simply lost their heads and thought they never
 "Had seen a poet so extremely clever.
 "He got conceited, claimed to be enthroned
 "Instead of *Æschylus*."

Eventually the decision is left to the judgment of *Dionysus*

In the concluding scene the struggle is exhibited. *Euripides* is beaten all along the line; and eventually *Dionysus*, who had come down to fetch back his quondam favourite, changes his mind and leads off *Æschylus* in triumph attended by the good wishes of *Pluto* and the Chorus.

While the criticism in detail is farcical in the extreme, *Aristophanes* is to some extent making a serious attack on the work of *Euripides*, both on moral and artistic grounds; at the same time he does not altogether spare *Æschylus*. This is apparent in the opening part of the contest when the two poets compare their general characteristics; while the chorus in a few short songs describe the combatants. *Æschylus* is often too sublime to be intelligible; his dramas are too "solemn and statuesque"; his language is too fantastic and his ideas too far fetched—his characters are not sufficiently human.

Euripides on the other hand is intelligible, but prosaic ; his scenes are those of everyday life ; his language is that of the man in the street ; his characters are human, too human in fact, being at times positively mean.

The moral tone of their respective tragedies is considered. Æschylus aims at making men " noble, vigorous and brave," Euripides on the contrary makes them clever and " prudent," so that " specially they know much more Of keeping house than e'er before." Aristophanes, the Tory, has but little sympathy with this point of view.

After such preliminary fighting the poets came down to detail.

SCENE IV.

A Hall in Pluto's Palace arranged like an Athenian Court of Law. In the background Pluto is seated on his throne, beside which stand four attendants. In front is Dionysus conducting the trial ; on his right stands Æschylus, on his left Euripides. The Chorus are present in Court as interested spectators.

Chorus. Now we long to hear from you,
Gentlemen of light and leading
What will be your first proceeding
With the enemy in view.
Fury is upon their tongue,
Both have got their manes erect,
And their nerves are highly strung ;
This is what we may expect :
He will speak with polished phrasing,
Smoothed and sharpened with a file ;
He with Titan volleys blazing
Scatter all his shifts and guile.

Eur. Well then I take his Prologues (1) first to test
For that comes naturally earliest.
The statement of his subjects is obscure.

Dion. Which will you test ?

(1) The " Prologos " is that part of a Greek play which precedes the first entry of the Chorus. (" Parodos "). In the works of Æschylus and Sophocles the prologue would often be a whole scene ; in Euripides it tended to consist of one or two mere introductory speeches, explaining the situation before the action of the play properly begins.

Eur. Why, lots of them to be sure.
First from the *Oresteia* (1) kindly read.

Dion. Silence in court! Now, Aeschylus, proceed.

Aesch. (*quoting*) (2) "Nether-world Hermes (3) thou beneath whose eye
The Father's powers are placed, oh! grant my prayer,
Be my preserver and ally in fight,
For to this land I come and do return,"
Find any fault in that?

Eur. Yes twelve or more.

Dion. Why all the lines together are but four!

Eur. But each has twenty errors for its share.

Aesch. You know that's nonsense.

Eur. Do you think I care?

Dion. Stop, Aeschylus, don't read another line,
(It's clear you'll only get an extra fine
For every fresh quotation, and the score
Is running up against you for those four.)

Aesch. I stop for *him*!

Dion. That's the advice I've given.

Eur. He starts with a mistake as high as heaven.

Aesch. What's my mistake? I'll thank you to explain.

Eur. Why certainly! Just say the lines again

Aesch. "Nether-world Hermes, thou beneath whose eye
The Father's powers are placed, oh! grant my prayer,
Be my preserver and ally in fight,
For to this land I come and do return."

(1) The "*Oresteia*," or Story of Orestes, is the only extant "trilogy" of Aeschylus. It consists of the "*Agamemnon*," the "*Choephoroe*" and the "*Eumenides*." In the first play the return of Agamemnon from Troy, and his murder by his wife, Clytemnestra, is depicted. In the second part of the story we have the return of Orestes, his recognition by his sister Electra, and the slaying of their mother, the murderess. Orestes is then haunted and persecuted by his mother's spirit and her avenging Furies (*Eumenides*), till at length he is acquitted and set free with the help of Athene.

(2) Aeschylus, *Choephoroe*, 1-3.

(3) Hermes, the winged messenger of the gods, used also to conduct the souls of the dead to Hades. Hence the title here *ἄνακτορος*.

Eur. How he repeats himself, the clever fellow

Aesch. Repeat myself! How?

Eur. Look at the phrase, I'll tell you :
He says that he "returned " and that he "came,"
Now "coming" and "returning" are the same.

Dion. By jove! it's just as if the navy said,
"Lend me a shovel, Bill, or else a spade."

Aesch. Far from it. Your incessant chattering
Has warped your sense ; my lines are just the thing.

Dion On what grounds tell me ?

Aesch. He who has a home
When he gets back there can be said to "come,"
He simply *comes*, and nothing else is meant ;
Both words apply to one in banishment (1.)

Dion. Good! Now, Euripides, for your attack.

Eur. Legally, I say, he never did come back,
For he stole in without the Government's leave.

Dion. Good too! (*aside.*) But what you mean I can't
conceive!

Eur. Next line please.

Dion. Yes, make haste, for goodness' sake
Go on ; and you (*to Euripides*) look out for the
mistake.

Aesch. (*Continuing quotation.*)
"And at this barrow on my sire I call
To hear and listen."

Eur. There he goes again!
"Listen" and "hear" are just the same, that's plain.

Dion. (*Making a joke.*)
You idiot! he was talking to the dead,
And they can't hear a thing, though three times said,
But how d'you write *your* Prologues ?

(1) The word here translated "return" (*katerchomai*) was the technical term for return from exile. Aeschylus maintains that the use of the word with reference to Orestes is here appropriate, and not merely tautologous.

- Eur. You shall see,
And if you notice a tautology,
Any extraneous matter or a trace
Of padding, then—*conspuez* in my face!
- Dion. Do say one; I am dying for a sight
Of the correctness of the lines you write.
- Eur. (*Quoting*) (1) "A happy man was Oedipus (2) at first.
- Aesch. (*Interrupting.*) Not he, by jove; but utterly accurst:
Doomed ere his birth the oracle to fulfil,
And, yet unborn, I say, his sire to kill,
How then was he a happy man at first?
- Eur. (*Disregarding the interruption.*)
"Then fell at last into the very worse misfortune."
- Aesch. No, not he! he never rose
Out of it. First, an infant, they expose
Him in a bit of crockery in a storm,
Not to grow up and do his father's harm;
And after that, with both ankles swelling (3),
He drifts away to Polybus' dwelling;
Then marries an old woman in his prime,
And she was his own mother all the time!
- Eur. Nonsense! I think my Prologues very fine. (4)
- Aesch. Well, I wont nibble at them line by line,
But, with the help of Heaven for the task,
I will overthrow them with a pocket flask.
- Eur. A pocket flask! You! Mine!

(1) From the "Antigone," of Euripides, a lost play.

(2) Oedipus was destined to slay his father, Laius, and marry his mother, Jocasta; a destiny which he fulfilled. The legend was treated in several plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and other Attic tragedians.

(3) Laius, King of Thebes, to avoid the threatened doom, exposed his infant son, on Mt. Cithaeron, after tying his ankles together. Here the child was found, with his feet badly swollen, by a shepherd who took him to the house of Polybus, King of Corinth, where he was brought up. The name 'Oedipus' means swollen-foot.

(4) Aeschylus, after accusing Euripides of absurdity in his treatment of the story of Oedipus, proceeds to criticize his Prologues because of the monotonous regularity of their rhythm, and their sameness of style. They are such that anything can be put in to fill up the line, moreover they are commonplace and undignified.

- Aesch. Yes, one will do 't ;
For any trisyllabic word will suit
With yon constructions as a counterpane,
A pocket-book or flask ; I'll make it plain
Directly.
- Eur. Eh? You will?
- Aesch. Most certainly.
- Dion. Recite the lines at once and let us see.
- Eur. (*Quoting grandly*) (1)
"Egyptus, as the ancient story goes,
Bringing his fifty sons across the wave
And reaching Argos ——"
- Aesch. (*Breaking into line.*) "Lost his pocket flask."
- Eur. Was that your pocket flask? Confound it then!
- Dion. Recite another and let's try again.
- Eur. Dionysus (2) who adown Parnassus' slopes
With wand and fawnskins 'mid the torches' gleam
Leaps in the dances " ——"
- Aesch. "Lost his pocket flask."
- Dion. Oh dear! The flask again! We're 'badly' hit.
- Eur. But I assure you 'twill not matter a bit ;
Here's one in which he cannot make it fit—
(*Quoting*) (3) "No mortal man there is in all things
blest,
Either with noble birth he lives in want,
Or being base born "——"
- Aesch. "Lost his pocket flask."
- Dion. Euripides!
- Eur. What is it?
- Dion. Shorten sail.
This pocket flask is like to blow a gale.
- Eur. I should not heed it—no, by mother earth!
I'll show him now how little it is worth.
- Dion. Well, try again and give it a wide berth.

(1, 2, 3) From the *Archelaus*, *Hypsipyle*, *Sthenoboea* of Euripides (all lost).

Eur. (*Again quotign.*)

(1) "Kadmus, when leaving the Sidonian town,
Son of Agenor"—

Aesch.

"Lost his pocket flask

Dion. That flask, my friend, I think you'd better buy,
Or it will ruin all your prologue.

Eur.

I buy from *him*?

Why?

Good counsel.

Eur.

I repeat it.

I've lots of prologues when he cannot use it.

"The (2) son of Tantalus to Pisa coming
"With his swift horses."

Aesch.

"Lost his pocket flask."

Dion. He's made it fit again, you must allow.

(*To Aesch.*) Good sir, restore it to him anyhow,
You'll get another beauty for a penny.

Eur. Not yet, by Jove! I've still got a good many.
(3) "Oeneus in harvest"

Aesch.

"Lost his pocket flask."

Eur. Do let me say the whole line, if you please,
"Oeneus in harvest gathering plenteous store
While sacrificing"—

Aesch.

"Lost his pocket flask."

(1) Europa, daughter of Agenor, King of Phœnicia, was carried away by Zeus. So Agenor ordered Cadmus his son, to seek her, and not to return without her. But in Thrace the oracle bade him abandon the search, and to follow a cow which should meet him, and found a city where she lay down. She led him to Boeotia, where he was attacked by a Dragon, which he slew. And when he had sown its teeth, armed men sprang up, and fought with each other until only five remained. With their help he founded the city which was afterwards to become famous as Thebes, and the five survivors became the founders of the Theban aristocracy.

(2) Pelops, son of Tantalus, came to Pisa in Southern Greece to compete in a chariot race for the hand of Hippodamia, the king's daughter. He won the victory, the bride, and the kingdom by the help of the winged horses given to him by the god Poseidon.

(3) Oeneus was King of Calydon, in Aetolia. And it happened that once while sacrificing he forgot to honour the goddess Artemis. So she sent a savage boar, which ravaged his country and slew his son, Meleager. And after this he was dethroned and imprisoned by his enemy Agrius, but being avenged by his grandson, who killed Agrius, he was himself treacherously slain by Agrius' two sons, who had escaped their father's fate.

Dion. (*Pretending to be much concerned.*)

While he was at it? Where were the police?

Eur. Never mind *them*. Answer this once again—

(1) "Zeus as the words of all true men maintain"—

Dion. (*Interrupting him.*)

Oh stop! He'll say "he lost his flask" and do you.

That wretched flask sticks just as closely to you

As any styke sticks on an eyelid! Take

The Lyrics for a change for goodness' sake!

[*A short interval ensues during which Aeschylus walk round exultant, while Dionysus consoles the crestfallen Euripides.*]

[*The lyric contest begins. Euripides sings a parody of one of Aeschylus' chorus songs, which fails to make sense, and is marked by a pointless refrain. Aeschylus replies by singing a supposed "Monody," or solo, of Euripides' composition which also is fantastic and muddled. Dionysus, Pluto and the Chorus listen in sorrow.*]

Eur. Mighty fine songs indeed! I'll show you soon;

I'll cut them all down to a single tune.

(*Sings.*) (2) "How the two throned might of
Achaea, of Hellas' offspring,

(3) Tophlatothrat! Tophlatothrat!

Sendeth the Sphinx as a shameless ordainer of evil

Tophlatothrat! Tophlatothrat!

Furious birds with the spear and the hand of
avengers,

Tophlatothrat! Tophlatothrat!

Giving a meal to the ravening hounds of the heavens,

Tophlatothrat! Tophlatothrat!

And the host that is riding with Ajax.

Tophlatothrat! Tophlatothrat!"

(1) From the Melanippe of Euripides (lost).

(2) These lines are put together from different plays of Aeschylus the Agamemnon, Sphinx, Thracian women.

(3) Supposed to be an imitation of the harp.

Aesch. (*Sings.*) O murky night, shrouded in gloom,
 Say why didst thou send to my room
 Out of the dark a nightmare dread
 Clad in black garments like the dead—
 A minister of death
 With breathless breath,
 Child of black night,
 A shuddering sight
 With bloody, bloody looks
 And talons long as hooks?—

Dion. (*Interrupting.*) Stop now your singing.

[*They now proceed literally to weigh the merits of the two poets. A large pair of scales is brought forward; and each poet takes hold of a scale, into which at the word of command he quotes one of his best verses, and then lets go. The scale of Aeschylus always drops. Dionysus carefully explaining to Euripides the cause on each occasion.*]

Dion. Enough of Lyrics!

Aesch. I should say it is I
 I want to take him to the balances,
 Which is the only way to bring conviction
 By proving our respective weight of diction.

Dion. (*Arranging the scales.*)

Now then you two stand by the scales!

Aesch. and Eur. All right
 Take hold of them and each in turn recite

Dion. And don't let go till I say "Cuckoo!"

Aesch. and Eur. Yes.

[*They each take hold of a scale.*]

Dion. Now speak your line into the balances

Eur. "Oh that the good ship Argo ne'er had flown" (1)

Aesch. "Spercheus river where the oxen stray" (2)

Dion. Cuckoo! let go!

[*They let go; Aeschylus' scale drops.*]

Yes this one certainly
 Has gone right down.

Eur. But why? I cannot see.

(1) From the *Medea* of Euripides (extant).

(2) From the *Philoctetes* (?) of Aeschylus (lost).

Dion. Because, he like a man that deals in wool
Put in a river ; rivers make it full
Of water ; that you know gives weight to things.
The line you put was light with feathery wings.(1)

Eur. Let's speak another and match weight for weight

Dion. Catch hold again then.

Aesch. and Eur. Ready all.

Dion. Now say it.

Eur. "Persuasion hath no temple than the tongue"(2)

Aesch. "Of all the gods Death only loves not gifts"(3)

Dion. Let go, let go.

[Aeschylus' scale again drops.]

Yes, down again his goes

He put in Death the *heaviest* of all woes.

Eur. Persuasion I ; what better could you find ?

Dion. Oh that's a *flimsy* thing without a mind !
But look another of your heavy weight's out
To pull your scale down, something large and stout.

Eur. "The iron-sheathed log in his right hand he took"(4)

Aesch. "For chariot heaped on chariot, corpse on corpse"(5)

[They let go, Aeschylus' scale again drops.]

Dion. This time again he's fooled you.

Eur. How do you mean ?

Dion. He put two chariots and two corpses in
Too heavy for a hundred Fellaheen.(6)

(1) Aeschylus by mentioning water in his verse made it heavy, like a woolseller makes his fleeces heavy. Euripides by the word "flown" has made his verse too light.

(2) From the *Antigone* of Euripides (lost).

(3) From the *Niobe* of Aeschylus (lost).

(4) From the *Meleager* of Euripides (lost).

(5) From the *Glaucus Potneius* of Aeschylus (lost).

(6) The Egyptians, as pyramid builders were proverbially capable of carrying heavy burdens.

Aesch. (*Triumphantly.*)

Let's have no more of single lines but put
Him in, child wife,—Cephisophon (1) to boot—
And let him take his books down from the shelf;
And pile them in, and sit on top himself!
And I'll just put two verses by their scale.

[*Dionysus pushes the scale aside, and in a puzzled manner addresses Pluto.*]

Dion. The men are friends of mine. I'll not decide
When you're impartial it is hard to judge.
And against neither will I feel a grudge,
For one I like, and one I think is clever.

Pluto. So, after all, you'll fail in your endeavour!

Dion. If I decide?

Pluto. You shall take one of them.
Not to be disappointed, which you please.

Dion. Thanks. (*Comes forward.*)

Listen now, think over your reply
I came down here to fetch a poet.

Eur. Why?

Dion. That Athens and the Drama (2) both may thrive.
Now all depends on what advice you give;
Whichever gives the best, I mean to take;
First about Alcibiades (3) give your views
For Athens is in hard labour what to say.

Eur. What is her own opinion of him, pray?

(1) Cephisophon lived in Euripides' house, and was supposed to have assisted him in the composition of his tragedies.

(2) It must be remembered that the Drama was once a religious and political institution at Athens. The performance of Tragedies and Comedies always constituted an important item in the festivals of Dionysus, being given under State supervision.

(3) The brilliant but unscrupulous Alcibiades after five years' exile from Athens, during which he had occupied himself in scheming with the enemies of his country, had been elected general, and re-called in 408 B.C. At Athens he won the good-will of his countrymen by escorting with his troops the Sacred Procession of the Mystics to Eleusis, which, owing to the war, had been impossible for several years. Shortly afterwards he took command of the Athenian fleet, but failing to win success, again fell under suspicion. Being deposed he withdrew to a castle of his in Thrace, where he died in 404 B.C.

Dion. She loves and hates and cannot do without him,
Now both of you say what you think about him (1).

Eur. "I hate a citizen by nature slow
To help his country, swift to work her woe,
Keen to his own, to her best interests blind."

Dion. (*To Aeschylus.*)
Now, sir, what suggestion can you find?

Aesch. "Rear not a lion's whelp within the State,
But if you *do*, knock under and obey it!"

Dion. (*Still perplexed.*)
By Zeus! I can't make up my mind not nearly,
This one (2) speaks cleverly, the other (3) clearly.

Plut. Decide.

Dion. (*After a short pause.*)
I have decided. Have you guessed?
I will select "the one my soul likes best." (4)

Eur. (*Anxiously.*)
Remember what a solemn oath you swore
To take me back. I was your friend before.

Dion. (*Solemnly.*)
(5) "My tongue had sworn—but" I'll choose Aeschylus.
(*Laughing and clapping Aeschylus on the shoulder.*)

Eur. (*Astonished.*)
What have you done? you villain! Scandalous.

Dion. I have only given Aeschylus first place.

Eur. And then you dare look me in the face?

(1) Euripides in his sententious style, and Aeschylus by one of his characteristic image, both sum up the character of the man. Aristophanes here seems to favour his second recall, as he is the only man left who can save Athens in the last stage of the war. (The city was taken in the following year, 404 B.C.)

(2) Euripides.

(3) Aeschylus.

(4) Possibly taken from a children's game.

(5) A parody on a line in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, "My tongue hath sworn it, but my soul is free." All Hippolytus meant in saying this, was that he had sworn without knowing all that the oath implied, but that he is still bound by it. Aristophanes by an outrageous travesty of meaning represents Euripides as defending perjury.

Dion. (*Blandly.*)
What's villainy, if the audience think (1) it well?
Eur. Wretch will you leave me dead down here in hell?

Dion. (*In mock solemnity.*)
"Who knows if living is not being dead," (2)
A breath your dimer, sleep a feather bed?

Exit Euripides crest-fallen.

Plut. Go inside Dionysus.

Dion. Wherefore, pray?

Plut. That I may feast you ere you sail away.

Dion. Thanks, that is quite a good idea, you know,
I'm not displeased the matters ended so.

(1) A parody on a line in the *Aeolus* of Euripides (lost), "What's villainy if the doers think it well?"

(2) Parodied from the *Polyidus* of Euripides (lost).

"Who knows if living is not being dead,
While death is reckoned life by those below."

Chorus. Now we bid you all farewell,
Leave you sweetly singing,
Chanting with victorious swell,
Loud the Frog-song ringing.

Ever let old Trinity
Stalwart grow in virtue,
Let a race spring forth from thee
Strong in brain and sinew.

Exeunt omnes.

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